

Curatorial
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Eugene Feldman / Prints / The Washington Print Club / The Corcoran Gallery of Art / March 2 to April 2, 1967

Hermann Warner Williams, Jr.
Director
The Corcoran Gallery of Art

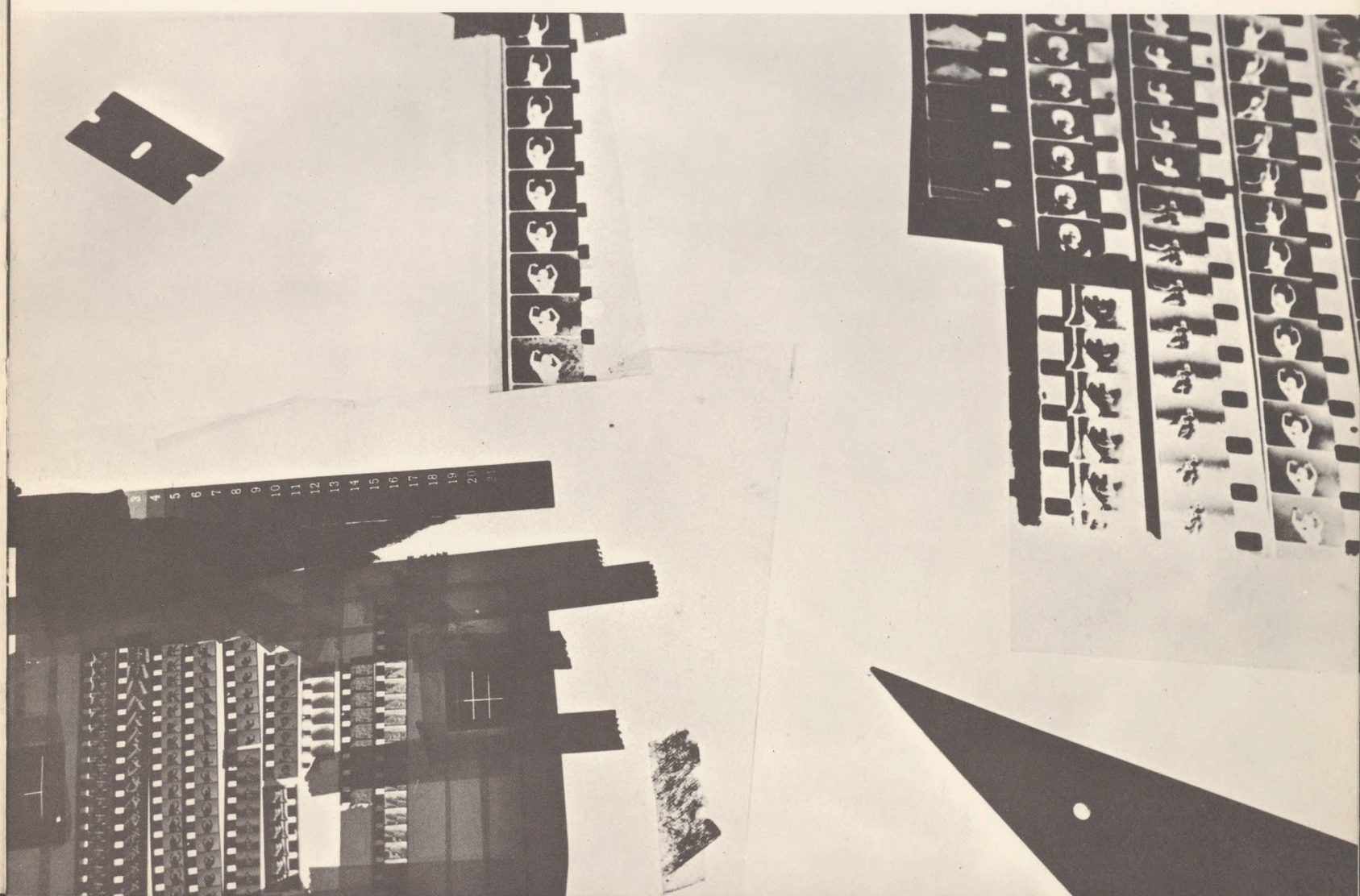
Tim Bornstein
President
The Washington Print Club

Eugene Feldman's offset lithographic techniques are unorthodox and controversial. The finished prints are very beautiful.

His work is evidence of the creative ferment in contemporary American print making. We are delighted that this important artist has consented to have his first Washington showing under the joint sponsorship of The Corcoran Gallery of Art and the Washington Print Club.

Eugene Feldman, more than any other printmaker, has demonstrated that the traditional concepts and categories of printmaking can be successfully enlarged. His work is the product of a remarkable marriage of photography and lithography; he is master of his medium and his art is powerful, personal and unique.

We are deeply indebted to Dr. Alan Fern of the Library of Congress for his perception and his generous efforts in organizing this exhibition. Mrs. Charles Bechhoefer of the Washington Print Club and the staff of The Corcoran Gallery have been indefatigable in planning and arranging this show.



To many viewers this exhibition of Eugene Feldman's graphic work will present unusual images through unfamiliar techniques. However, the fact that Feldman has been making prints for a number of years—the competency and originality of which have just won him a Guggenheim Fellowship—is an indication that his efforts have not gone unnoticed. Besides local recognition of his talents in one-man shows and group exhibitions, Feldman's work has been displayed in Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum and Zurich's Kunstgewerbemuseum and Rio de Janeiro's Museum of Modern Art.

Perhaps because his production is an integral part of his privately owned and commercially successful Falcon Press on Philadelphia's Ransstead Street, Feldman's reputation as an ingenious typographer and book designer has surpassed his recognition as an equally inventive printmaker. The public's lack of acquaintance with this side of his work may be attributed to the circumstances that his prints are produced in a singular way that does not bear the cachet of orthodoxy, and that they have received a minimum degree of promotion. In a world full of banality, and particularly in a field where derivative art commands so much attention, it is refreshing to be able to exhibit an original talent that contributes a new dimension to printmaking, for Feldman is a pioneer in the use of photo-offset processes for original and creative graphics.

Offset lithography emerged as a commercial printing process around 1906. Essentially it is the transfer of ink from a prepared surface to a smooth rubber covered cylinder which, in turn, transfers that ink onto the surface to be printed. The first of these surfaces, or offset plate, is made of zinc or aluminum which is fitted to a cylinder in the press. This plate is generally directly above and contiguous to the rubber covered cylinder, below which passes the paper which receives the final image.

Although the offset plate can be drawn upon directly, just as an artist draws upon a lithographic stone or zinc plate to make what is called a lithograph, the offset plate is usually sensitized to receive a photographic image—whether pictorial or typographical. Photography thus becomes a most important part of the photo-offset process.

There are several advantages to offset printing over letterpress printing. Material can be photographed in a distorted manner creating, for instance, unprecedented shapes of alphabetic letters unavailable in commercial fonts of type. Correction of the final photo image can be cheaper and simpler than similar corrections in letterpress. There is no indentation of the paper in offset because printing is managed from one smooth surface to another. And finally, because of its cylindrical design, the rotary offset press can operate at higher speeds than can a flat-bed press. For many years offset printing did not equal letterpress printing in quality, due to a large extent to imperfect photographic techniques, and to a lack of clarity or sharpness in printing resulting from the multiple transfer process—each image becoming slightly less well defined in each step. Today, however, the two processes produce such similar results that the choice of medium is more likely to be based on economic rather than aesthetic considerations.

The offset plate, from which the image is transferred to rubber covered cylinder and then to paper, becomes the surface upon which the printer, or in this case the artist, photographically imposes his design. This design may be anything from a drawing, or a printed subject, or a photograph, to a combination of all three. Feldman's unusual prints are produced in a multiplicity of ways, for he not only utilizes the camera as a creative tool, but he also experiments with the textures of his plates as well as with the preparation of "make-ready" or the surface under the rubber cylinder.

Since numerous variations are possible in each step, it would be difficult to spell out exactly what methods Feldman uses. In the creation of the original photograph alone there are such possibilities as the distortion of image, blocking out of areas, overlaying of negatives, photographing through textures, or separation and selection from color negatives. Transferring this picture to the sensitized plate can be done by direct method or through screens of various sizes and textures. Meanwhile the sensitized surface can be prepared with coarse or fine grain; or areas can be desensitized altogether. The image can then be printed on papers of various textures, using uncommon colors to produce unusual effects with inks that can be transparent or opaque.

It becomes apparent that in the hands of a creative person there is such a gamut of choice that truly extraordinary and exciting results are possible. This exhibition displays such a talent.

Kneeland McNulty
Curator of Prints and Drawings
Philadelphia Museum of Art

The high contrast negatives are used to make enlargements on thin paper. Intermediate film positives are shown in the darkroom with the paper negatives. Through this process details are subordinated to larger forms, and elaborate gradations of tone are reduced to black and white.



Some printmakers shrink the world into a tiny space, populating a few square inches of paper with complex forces. Eugene Feldman, in contrast, often takes a simple visual fact and enlarges it until it has a compelling power. He occupies a place of his own in the range of competences that make up the graphic arts, and probably can be placed best somewhere between artist-printmaker and photolithographer; at that, he shifts his position now and then, depending on the work at hand.

Mr. Feldman's basic tools are totally modern. The camera, the photolithographic plate (with its associated films), and the power-driven offset press were unknown to Dürer or to Rembrandt and still are scorned by the "pure" printmaker. The processes which underlie these prints are fundamentally different from any of the traditional printmaking media and make different demands on the artist's skill.

Since the beginnings of printmaking, almost six centuries ago, the printmaker has physically altered a surface so that its raised (and) lowered portions, when inked, would print the image cut into it.

At the end of the 18th century lithography was devised. Here the physical cutting, gouging or scratching of a printing matrix is replaced by a chemical process depending on the antipathy of water and grease.

If the artist drew on the clean printing surface with a greasy crayon or paint, then moistened the surface (after fixing his drawing chemically against spreading or disintegration), the water would avoid the original drawing and a greasy printing ink applied to the surface would adhere only where the drawing had been, permitting prints to be pulled after each inking.

In this century lithography was joined to an even younger technique, photography, to provide a means of transferring images to the lithographic plate by using a camera. In uninspired hands, photolithography is at best a reproductive medium; Mr. Feldman, however, has made it a uniquely expressive medium by using photography as freely as a painter uses a brush.

The photolithographer has one restriction: he must work in absolutes of black and white (or solid color); no intermediate tones are normally possible. To give the effect of various shades of grey a halftone screen is commonly used which breaks the solid color into tiny dots of varying size (smaller, in the light areas of the final print, and larger in the darks) which appear to the eye as tonal gradations. Mr. Feldman rarely uses the halftone screen; instead, he builds complicated tonal values by successive printings in different colors of ink or else he abandons altogether the imitation of the tones of a photograph in his work.

In his prints of birds and of spotted animals he enlarges portions of a small photograph to giant size, but in making his printing plate he utilizes the contrast-creating property of photolithographic film to render each form with a hard edge—avoiding the slight unsharpness and granularity familiar in enlarged photographs. As the film reacts to grey tones in the original (which it must render as either white or black), new shapes are created that are often very beautiful and which reveal something unfamiliar and strange in natural objects.

In his prints of the New York skyline and of the Schuylkill Parkway, Mr. Feldman uses negatives made at different exposures, and through different filters, and by successive printing in color builds rich, mysterious images out of an ordinary scene:

Beneath the colors of these dark prints are waste sheets of college catalogs and advertisements (for Mr. Feldman is proprietor of a commercial printing firm) and the use of these sheets imparts an accidental quality to his work. He delights in the differences between printings of the same plates on various underlying shapes and colors, or in the new effects gained by using different printing colors for the various plates.

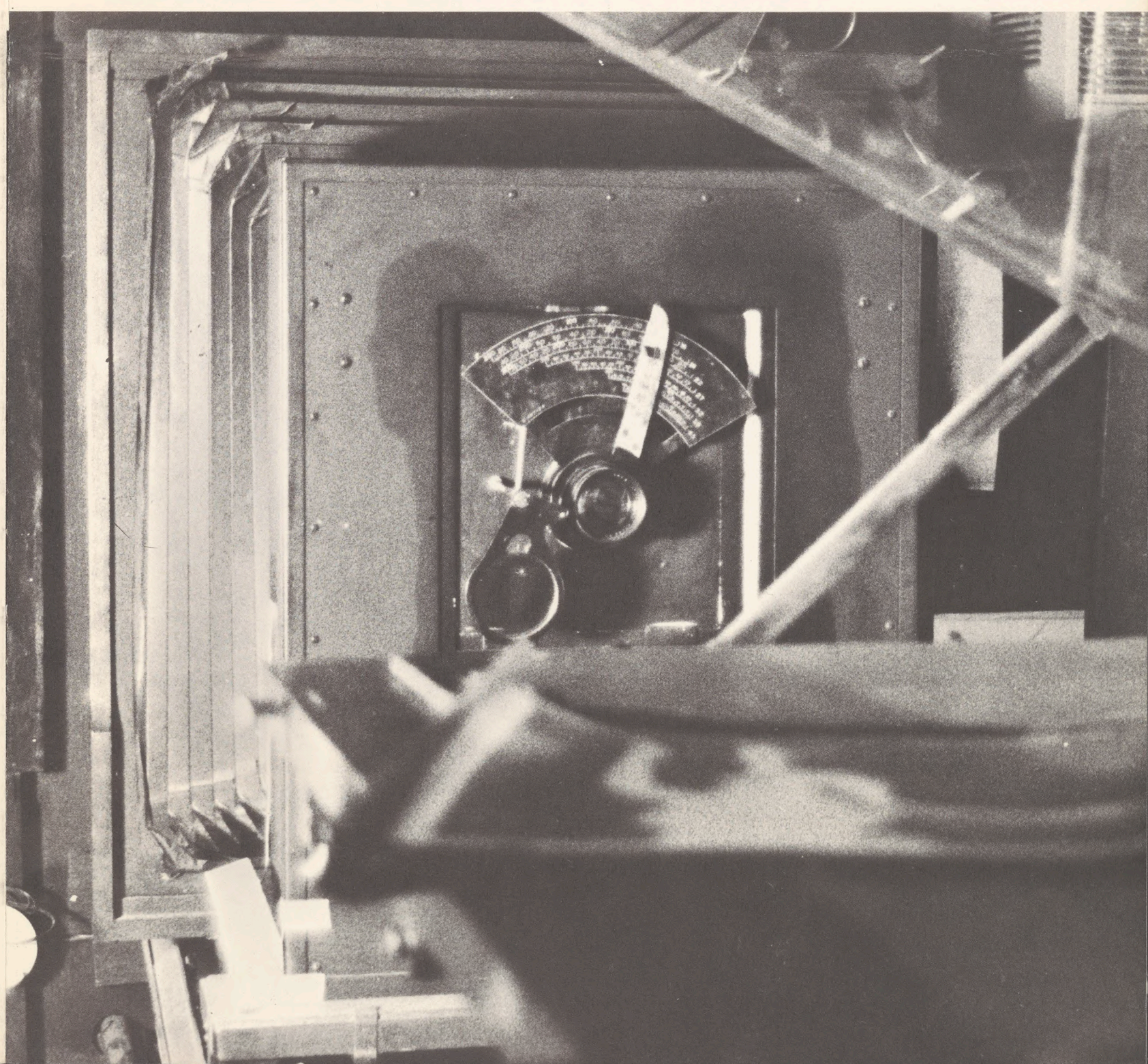
His command of color is extraordinary, ranging from the resonant blacks of his overprintings through the transparent, limpid colors of his Venetian triptych to the brilliant pure hues of some of his more recent prints.

His sense of composition is sure, and allows him to compose complicated forms in an orderly step-and-repeat pattern, or to place a beautifully seen single form on a white sheet as surely as a Chinese calligrapher.

In some of the books produced at his Falcon Press, Mr. Feldman has experimented with a variety of ways to create lithographic images. He has worked with "blanket" printing (in which no plate is used on the press, but where instead cut-out shapes are placed under the blanket of the press to be inked for transfer of their forms to the paper) and has photographed objects such as crumpled paper directly onto plates in the copying camera or vacuum frame.

As a teacher, as a printer, and as a printmaker, Eugene Feldman avoids preconceptions about what can be done in lithography. For this reason, perhaps, he has remained a consummate technician while being incredibly creative. Although his prints are formally related to recent abstract painting, in their poetic and powerful treatment of the visible world they are very different from anything else being done today. Mr. Feldman can make us see a universe of color and shape latent in familiar images but invisible to most of us. He does not run away from representation, as the abstract expressionists did for a while, but harnesses it, as he has tamed the lithographic press.

Alan M. Fern
Assistant Chief
The Library of Congress
Prints and Photographs Division



José Gómez-Sicre
Chief, Division of Visual Arts
Department of Cultural Affairs
Pan American Union

I have been following the career of Eugene Feldman as a painter and more particularly as a printer for quite some time now. I am able to recall a number of experiments that he performed on various instances in the past—experiments which then, though interesting in themselves, seemed no more than that, but which later, viewed in perspective, have taken on a new significance. There was the occasion—about seven years ago—when he worked with the multiple reproduction of an image by offset for purposes of pure design, with a view to the enhancement of a book he was in the process of publishing. I remember too tests of the appearance of vibration produced by lines painted across images and explorations of kinetic effects derived from pure abstractions. What I do not recall is any claim on the part of Feldman to be revolutionizing art in any of its forms. He made no pretenses to being an innovator, still less a genius. His sole concern was with artistic creation.

Lately I have witnessed the presentation, as a new departure in art, of repetitious images of Marilyn Monroe or Elizabeth Taylor reproduced by the same offset process and utilizing the same strong basic colors that had been employed in Feldman's work years before. Still more recently kinetic illusions produced by abstractions have come to the fore on the artistic scene. It is obvious to me that Feldman was a forerunner of both "pop art" and "op art", having practiced them long before they attained their present popularity in the United States.

As a technician in typography, Feldman has taught at the Philadelphia Museum School of Art, now the Philadelphia College of Art, and is presently consulting director for his specialty at that institution. He also holds a professorship in the Graduate School of Fine Arts of the University of Pennsylvania. The center of his activity, however, is a small printshop on Ranstead Street in the heart of Philadelphia—The Falcon Press. A livelihood is provided by contracts for the commercial printing—always by offset—of calendars, almanacs, programs for sport and art events, and brochures of various kinds. Feldman not merely prints but designs this attention-catching material. Seeking to avoid both vulgarity and the assembly-line touch, spurred by the urge to create, he is continually engaged in experiment, sometimes against the will of his customers, but always with results which show him to be a genuine artist.

From time to time he engages in more ambitious undertakings, to such good effect that books bearing the imprint of his Falcon Press are eagerly sought after by bibliophiles throughout the United States, Europe, and Latin America. They offer examples not merely of fine printing but of a clever blending of illustration and typography into a single unit. Particularly significant in this regard are two medium-format volumes, *Doorway to Portuguese* and *Doorway to Brasília*, in which Feldman collaborated with the Brazilian artist Aloísio Magalhães.

A major venture in the same line is *The Worlds of Kafka and Cuevas*, into whose production Feldman and the Mexican draftsman José Luis Cuevas put several exhausting months. Rapidly bought up by collectors, it is now out of print. It affords an example of austere maturity, both on the part of Cuevas as an illustrator and on that of Feldman as a printer. A new publication, *New York, Westside Skyline*, takes the form of a Japanese scroll. Meant to be looked at rather than read, it evidences a new conception of continuity of form, obtained through multiple impressions in different colors.

I have watched Feldman experiment in the darkroom and with his offset press and have seen him in the process of creating a book with his hands. With zinc plates he obtains unsuspected qualities of texture; by adding extraneous elements under the rubber blanket on one cylinder he achieves the most astonishing effects in printing. Accident may be accepted if the result has genuine artistic value. Few artisans, however, are so fastidious as he, so concerned with perfection even in the smallest details. Often a job is discarded for failure to meet his standards of satisfaction.

Feldman's lithographs, which were executed recently, generally from photographs, are remarkable for the effects created. When parallel lines are set in vibration, when an eight-millimeter film frame of the face of Mrs. John F. Kennedy is amplified to form a nebulous abstraction, when multiple enlargement transforms a still of seagulls in flight into a nonobjective design, when a strangely classical serenity is imparted to a snapshot of Barbra Streisand, when microphotography translates a fly's head into an artistic fantasy, the work is that of a genuine creator. Feldman's tool of expression is a mechanical device, but in purity of conception his achievement is comparable to that of the painter with his brush and pigment or the sculptor with his chisel and stone.

This exhibition of the work of Eugene Feldman provides the viewer with the double satisfaction of enjoyment of an aesthetically finished product and appreciation of the pioneer effort of a harbinger of the newest and most-discussed artistic movements of our day.

English translation by Ralph E. Dimmick



Biography

- 1921 born in Woodbine, New Jersey
- 1934 started Falcon Press, Woodbine, New Jersey
- 1941 attended Philadelphia School of Industrial Art (Philadelphia College of Art)
- 1943 stationed in London and Paris with army mapping unit
- 1948 moved Falcon Press to Philadelphia
- 1956 appointed director of typographic division of the Philadelphia College of Art
- 1957 published Doorway to Portuguese with Aloisio Magalhães
- 1959 published Doorway to Brasilia with Aloisio Magalhães visited Brazil as guest of Brazilian Government
- 1960 published The World of Kafka and Cuevas with Louis Glessman
- 1962 Visiting lecturer, Graphics Department of the Graduate School of Fine Arts—University of Pennsylvania
- 1962 published The Notebooks and Drawings of Louis I. Kahn with Richard S. Wurman
- 1964 awarded Max Katzman Prize for lithography—Print Club
- 1965 published New York, West Side Skyline
- 1966 spot book, A Portfolio of Animal Prints published by The Philadelphia Museum of Art
- 1966 awarded Guggenheim Fellowship for research in photo-offset lithography

Exhibitions

- 1957 Dubin Gallery, Philadelphia
- 1958 The Print Club, Philadelphia
- 1959 The Art Alliance, Philadelphia
- 1960 Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
The Philadelphia Gallery
Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey
Bryn Mawr Art Center, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania
- 1961 North Carolina State University
- 1962 Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Kunstgewerbemuseum, Zurich, Switzerland
Werkschule, Hamburg, Germany
Philadelphia Museum College of Art, Philadelphia
- 1964 Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- 1965 Pratt Graphic Art Center, New York
- 1966 Philadelphia Museum of Art

Collections

- Philadelphia Museum of Art
- Museum of Modern Art, New York
- Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Museum of Modern Art, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- Rosenwald Collection, Philadelphia
- Wilmington Museum of Art, Delaware
- Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France
- The Print Club, Philadelphia
- CBS, New York
- Bibliothek der Kunstgewerbeschule, Zurich

Group Shows

- Lithographs, The Print Club, Philadelphia (1956-1958, 1964, 1965)
- Paintings, The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (1958)
- Graphics, Museum of Modern Art, New York; United States Fair, Moscow (1962); Philadelphia Museum of Art (1964)



Catalogue

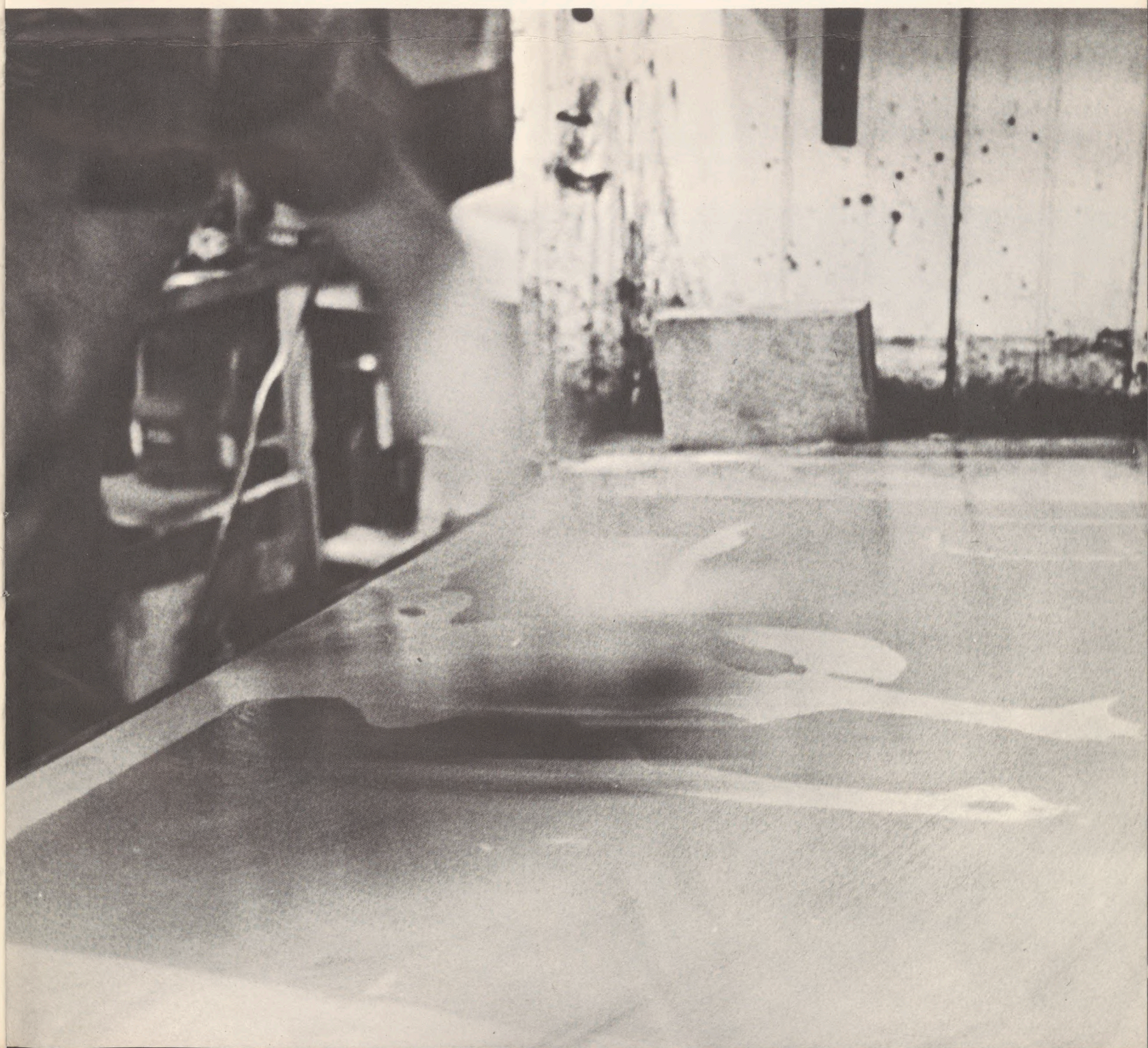
- 1 Girl from Brooklyn, No 4 1966
- 2 Girl from Brooklyn, No 1 1966
- 3 View of The Schuylkill Expressway 1963
- 4 Friend's Son 1966
- 5 Friend's Daughter 1966
- 6 Friend's Wife No 1 1966
- 7 Friend's Wife No 2 1966
- 8 Pregnant Woman 1959
- 9 Segovia 1965
- 10 Friend's Wife 1965 from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Nipon
- 11 Sarah 1965
- 12 1958 1958
- 13 Spot Book, published by the Philadelphia Museum of Art 1966
- 14 Dancer, final print 1965
- 15 Night Ride, Schuylkill Expressway 1963
- 16 Brazilian Landscape, Bahia 1965
- 17 St. Mark's Square, Venice 1965
- 18 Gondolas of Venice 1965
- 19 Neagle's View of Venice 1958
- 20 Self Portrait 1954 from the collection of Dr. and Mrs. Irwin Breslow
- 21 Portrait of Albert Einstein, proof sheet 1966
- 22 Calendar 1965
- 23 Self Portrait, Brasilia 1965
- 24 Woman No 1 1964
- 25 Birds of the Schuylkill 1963
- 26 Landscape, blanket print 1962
- 27 Reflections Amsterdam 1967
- 28 Girl from Hong Kong, collage print 1967
- 29 Portrait of an Architect, collage print 1967
- 30 View of Venice 1967
- 31 View of Venice collage print 1967
- 32 New York, West Side Skyline 1963
- 33 Portrait of a Musician 1963

Notes

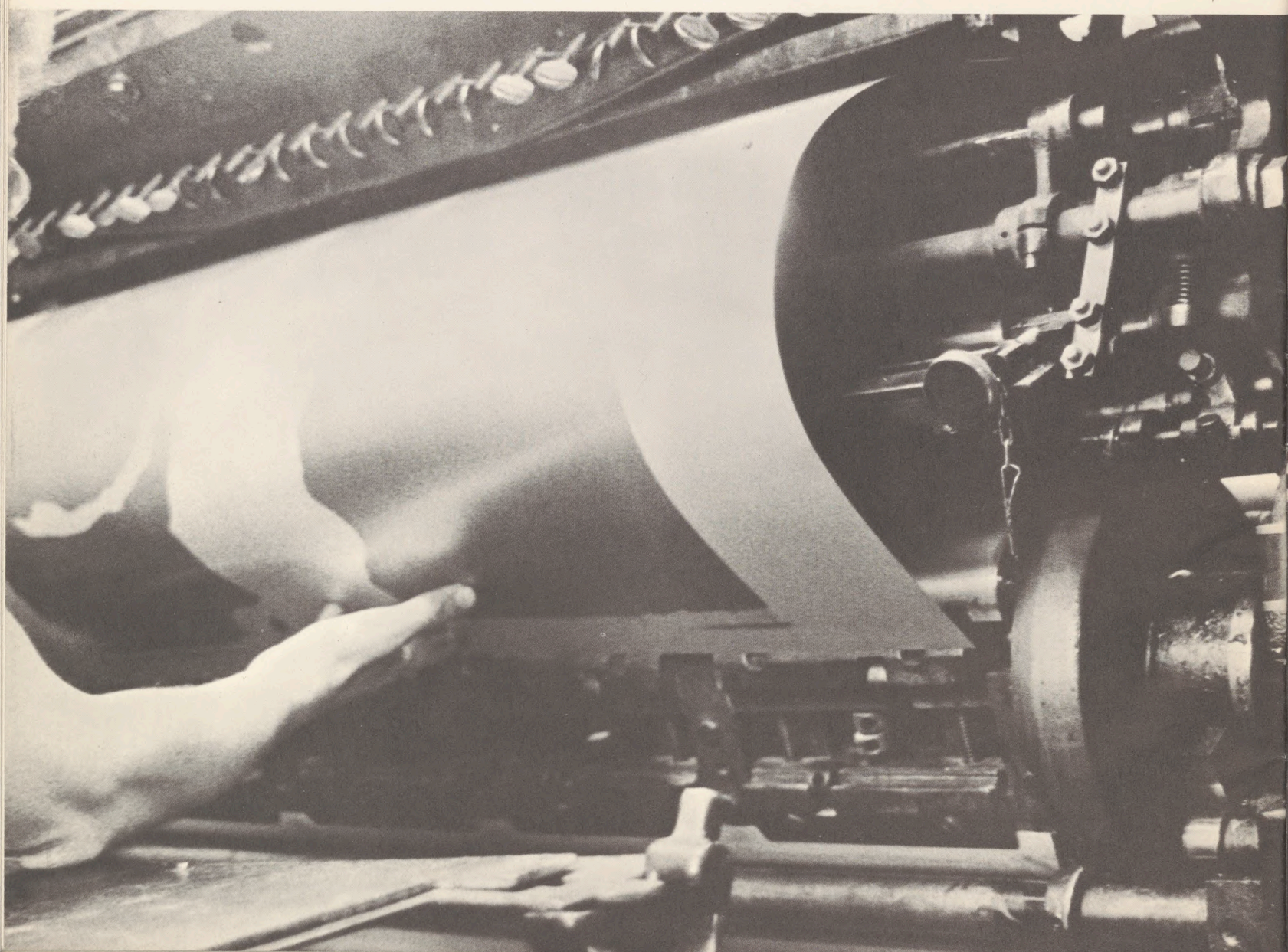
Copies of The Spot Book are available in the Art Rental Gallery

Duplicate Prints and Books are available

Illustrations in the Catalog are details from the Spot Book



The fully developed plate is put on the power-driven offset lithographic press. In offset, the image from the plate is transferred to a "blanket" roller which carries the image onto a sheet of paper without reversing it as in other printing techniques. The lithographic image is formed by an area of grease which repels water; the portions of the plate which are not to be inked are kept moist—and hence do not attract excess ink.





Other plates—for other tones or colors—are prepared in the same manner as this one. In other runs through the press they are printed on the same sheet of paper in accurate register, using different colors of ink, to produce the finished print.



